11:00 - Call to prayer

O, Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we humbly come into the sanctuary of thy presence. We pray, knowing the limitations of our own minds, - knowing that even before we speak, thou dost know our hearts. We rejoice our Father, at the privilege of prayer: we rejoice that in our Lord Jesus Christ we have the assurance that thou dost hear - and answer us.

O Lord God, we praise thy Holy name - For the beauty of the earth: For the changing of the seasons: For the infinite wisdom that brought Forth the world and all that is therein.

We thank thee O God, For life itself: For the privilege of living in thy world. We thank thee our Father For things seen - and unseen - that add to the meaning and purpose of our life. - For homes and families: For Friendship and love: for the intangible joys of beauty, happiness.

Our Father, thou who hast given us all that we have we beseech thee on behalf of our fellowmen. Be with those who suffer: be with those who live apart from thy will. Be with those who labor in thy name throughout the world - giving them courage and the power of thy Holy Spirit. Be with those who know not the joy of love and Friendship: be with those who live in Fear and anxiety.

Grant us O God, thy Grace that we may live lives acceptable in thy sight. Make us ever mindful of thy presence - in our jobs, in rest and in recreation. Help us to see the love of Christ in each other - that we might learn to live in a relationship of forgiveness & acceptance with all men. Grant to us the vision, truth and courage of thy prophets - that we might effectively serve thee in this place. Help us to be thy church - the true body of the son Jesus Christ: - in whose name ~~pray~~ we live and worship and pray: and to whom with Thee & the Holy Spirit - be all glory and all honor, now and Forever. Amen

THE MADNESS OF CHRISTIANITY OCTBER 20, 1963 MARK:#3:7---35

In many ways the Gospel according to Mark is the easiest to read among the four accounts. It is almost always recommended as the place to begin when ones sets out to read the bible. It is brief and to the point: it proceeds at an exhausting rate, never giving the readers an opportunity to lose interest. Reading through Mark, a project of less than an hour, can be an exctting experience. But for many of the same reasons that Mark is the easiest Gospel to read, it is also the most difficult to interpret. From a scholarly standpoint, Mark presents innumerable problems. None of the Gospels is a biographical account of the life of Jesus in the techinacal sesnse of theword bigraphy: and Mark is the least biographicql of the four. Unlike Matthew and Luke, whose accounts contain descriptive passages of great lenghth, Mark is almost totally unconcerned with detail. Unlike the fourth gospel, which begins with a deep theologival affirmation, MArk has little time for theology and philosophy. It is as if Mark was working against a time limit: and having been assigned the task of writing a document that would convince peole that Jesus was the Son of God, he sat down and dashed off everything he knew and had heard in one sitting. The other three gospel writers go to great pains to arrange their material in logical and chronological order sequence. But Mark lumps two and three themes together in one paragraph, and records Jesus as saying and doing things - that in Matthew involve many different and separate occassions.

The third chapter of Mark, from which our New testament lesson was read this morning, is a prime example of the interpretative difficulties encountered in the Gospel. At the beginning of the chapter Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath: engages in a pointed dialogue witht the Pharisees about the Sabbath law: and prompts immediate oppostion to his ministry. Without comment we are ushered to a new scene, this one by the sea, and the crowd following him is so great he is forced to seek refuge in a boat. In this episode we are told, almost as an after thought, that whenever he encountered unclean spirits they recognized him and fell down and worshipped him.

As abruptly as it was introduced, the scene changes again and Jesus goes up into the hills and appoints his twelve disciples. Thenwe are told, he went home. But lest we put the book down, Mark is quick to inform us that the crowd converged on him again. This time Mark adds the disturbingly blunt comment that his frineds went in to sieze him, for they said ("He is beside himself".) This is an episode we would like to discuss, but Mark mushes on, introducing a group of scribes sent from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus and his preaching. These scribes, having seen and heard Jesus in action, promptly accuse him of an alliance with Beelzebab, the prince of the Evil Spirits. Another brief debate follows and the chapter ends with Jesus' mother and brothers coming to take him away: and his unforgetable reply: ("whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.")

In a short chapter of 35 verses, there are seven completel different situations, a distance of many miles traveled, and by conservative estimates, a span of several months in the ministry of our Lord. There is however, a major theme that keeps emerging in the chapter, one to which I now want to call your attention. It is the general subject of madness. It is expressed first in the Evil Spirits' recognition of Jesus: secondly in his friend's fears that ("He is beside himself":) thirdly in the charges made against him that he is actually an ally of the prince of the evil spirits: and fourthyly in the appearance of his mother and brothers, who apparently are so disturbed by the way he is acting that they have come to take him away.

To reach any understanding of this general theme;- the reasons why Jesus was thought to be beside himself; we must know what Mark and his culture thought about the subject. WE have to know who and what these evil spirits were: we have to understand how Mark can record these serous charges and implications about Jesus as of they are perfectly understandable.

In the thought-world of the first century there existed a whole realm of evil Spirits. Israel had long believed in one God and had rejected superstition and belief in Spirits: butt the strict monotheism of Israel had been infected with

Greek and Pagan influences: and it was just normal to believe in the existence of a spiritual underworld , which was the residing place of the forces of evil. The underworld, in the thought of the day, was a structured kingdom populated by many evil spirits or demons. It was thought that they roamed he earth at random: and wwre constantly engaged in all out struggle with the powers of good - or God. Every so often, one of these evil spirits would occupy the body of a man: and the man would be caused to do all sorts of steange and evil things. His behavior was not like societies norm, and because of the deep superstition involved, these wrethched souls were total and complete outcasts. The persons in question were, in modern terminology, mentally ill. Today they would fall into all the different categories of mentall illnes that have been devised by Psychology and psychiatry. Some of them were epileptics, whose siezures of epilepsie were a sure sign of the presence of a demon.

Along with this understanding there was the belief that a demon could be cast out in two differnt ways. An evil spirit of higher rank in the underworld could do it: or the force of good, God that is, could cast a demon out. The accusations against Jesus now become clear. He cast out demons so was charged with being an ally of the chief demon, the Prince of evil called Beelzebub. The other alternative was that he was doing it in the name of God: but he always said "I command you to come out of him" I.E. he was doing it in his own name - an act of serious blasphemy in itself. This is a recurring theme in the life of Christ: the role played by the evil spirits is prominent throughout the New Testament: in fact we can hardly gain any understanding of the Life of Christ until we know what is indicated with every appearence of unclean spirits of demons.

Here and throughout the N.T. the madmen seem to be the only ones who immediately recognize Jesus for who he is. They seem instinctively to have this insight. Those who ought to know, his friends and disciples: the religious authorities and the scribes are either confused or convinced that he is a dangerous imposter. But the unclean spirits fall down before him and say "You are the Son of God." If it happened only here we could attribute it to Mark's peculiar demonology: but it happens time and time again. ~~This fact alone ought to show~~ that

Today, there is nothing so illusive as the term mentally ill. The term insane, and its correspondent, sanoty, are purely legal terms and mean absolutley nothing to the person who is concerned witht the nature of mantal illness. Normality and abnormality are equally as meaningless, for who is to say what is normal and what is not. In fact, there is probably a greater gap between fact and superstition, between scince and opinion, in the firld of mantal health than in any other field. or discipline.

For centuries mentall illnes was treated in much the same way as it was in Biblical da=ys. Sufferrers were treated as outcasts: social ostracization turned into public punishment. The mentally ill were chained in dungeons, locked in prisons, drowned and burned at the stake. But in the past loo years the behavioral sciances have flowered into a breadth that is still increasing. Today mentall illness falls into two very general categories. The one is completely an organic difficulty: XE i.e.a brain tumor, or deformation of the nevous system. The other is non organic: a sickness of the soul — and is not caused by a specific physical difficulty. This type of mentall illness is not corrected by surgery and calls for another type and approach to treatment. Technically speaking the lines between the two cannot be so sharply drwan but we have learned that mental health, like phisical health, is relative rather than absolute. Most of us here today are haeothy, but a thorough physical examination would show that soem are healthier than others: and that all of us are a little different in regard to out state of healthiness. The same is true of mental health.: all of us, relatively speaking, are not equally as healthy mentally.

Along the same line, we are not so quick to call a man mad taoday mbmbab just because he doesn't measure up to our standards of normality. The cliches "Mad scientis and absent minded professor" have logic behind them: for we know that the gifted : the brilliant: the possessor of deep insight, very frequently will be totally unconcerned about the standards of normality that society has established. Albert Einstein was one of the most brilliant menr of our nxxxxx: and by ordinary standards he was anything but normal. His appearence was always bedraggled: his mannerisms were eccentric: and he took walks in his bare feet. There was a day: and I suppose there are places today where this sort of things is taken for madness or insanity.

And yet if there is a place today where new ideas: new approaches and new programs are viewed with suspicion it is the chrurch of Jesus Christ. Christians resist new translations of the Bible, new worship services, new customs and conventions, clinging to the old and conventional as if their life depended on it. I have experienced that churchmen don't even like to sing a new hymn.

Sinclair Lewis once wrote about establishing a "Society for the Promotion of Madness Among the Respectable Classes." The Church of Jesus Christ ought to be such a society. We ought to pursue the madness of Jesus Christ: the madness that disregards conventions and standards of normality - and to every situation applies the will of God. The church, of all places, should not be where we ask, "What is normal? what is respectable" but "What is the will of God?"

Jesus Christ was called mad: and so was the Apostle Paul, and the Prophets of Israel , and Francic of Assissi, and Martin Luther. These men knew that to do the work of God meant breaking customs and being different: in meant acting in a way many times incomprehensible to society. The Church needs this type of Madness: We as individual Christians could do no better than to have our friends look at us and observe - - "They are beside themselves."

O God, our heavenly father, fill us with thy Holy Spirit: Ignite in us the flame of faith: that we may be obediant to thy will. Give us courage O LOrd, That we might act with conviction even in the face of suspicion and adversity. Give us that singlenss of purpose that has charagterized great men of the faith down through the centuries. Help us, our father, to give up ourselves, willingly to thyn service for we pray in the name of Him who men called mad - evn Jesus Christ. Amen